

## BETWEEN FLORENCE AND AVIGNON

grant what Neri, the bearer of this letter, will ask you, if it is possible to you and according to your will. I beseech you to give him audience, and believe what he will tell you. And because sometimes it is impossible to write what one would wish, I add, if you want to send to tell me something secret, tell him by word of mouth with confidence (for you can) whatever can be accomplished by me. If it were necessary to give my life, I would gladly give it for the honour of God and for the salvation of souls."<sup>1</sup>

Catherine's appeal had reached the Florentines in an auspicious moment. Although Niccolo Soderini was no longer in the government, the Signoria that held office for March and April contained at least one moderate man: Buonaccorso di Lapo Giovanni. The need was pressing ; papal envoys from Avignon had been sent in all directions, ordering every sovereign and commonwealth to break off relations with the Florentines and expel them from their dominions, and many States had obeyed ; papal galleys were intercepting Florentine ships, and making booty of their merchandise ; the Breton mercenaries were quickly gathering together. Catherine's offer of mediation was accepted, and, at the beginning of May, accompanied by Stefano Maconi, Fra Bartolommeo di Domenico, and her usual company of men and women, she came to Florence. The new Signoria was less pacifically inclined than its predecessor, and included Giovanni Dini, one of the Eight. Nevertheless, the Priors came out of the gate of the city to meet her, and besought her to go on their behalf to Avignon, to secure at least a favourable hearing for the ambassadors they were about to send.

During the few weeks that Catherine now stayed in Florence, while the diplomatic arrangements were being made, she put herself in touch with every class in the State, and made spiritual disciples in every direction. She was already acquainted with Messer Angelo Ricasoli, the hike-warm, time-serving bishop, and with Niccolo Soderini, the upright and devout republican ; possibly also with Carlo Strozzi, a wealthy burgher of the Parte <sup>1</sup> Letters 228 (278) and 218 (3). 171